

wire and said top surface of said dielectric layer in a reducing environment.

[Claim 36] 36. The method of claim 21, wherein said one or more characterization procedures are selected from the group consisting of optical or SEM inspection, optical or SEM image size measurement and electrical probing.

[Claim 37] 37. The method of claim 21, wherein said first capping layer is thin enough to be transparent to visible light, to back-scattered electrons in a SEM or to both.

[Claim 38] 38. The method of claim 21, wherein said first capping layer is thin enough to allow penetration of said first capping layer by a point of a conductive probe tip in order to make electrical contact to said wire.